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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000645

SIPDIS

STATE PASS TO USAID

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR INAUGURATES SELF-HELP SEWING WORKSHOP PROJECT

1.(U) Summary: The Ambassador, Pol/Econ and Self-Help Clerk traveled April 28, to the southern city of Dikhil to inaugurate a Self-Help project for the Dikhil Women's Union. Hosted by the District Commissaire, the Ambassador toured Dikhil, including several farms and the town's computer center. Ambassador also met with the Commissaire and two of the twelve Dikhil district parliamentarians. End Summary.

2. (U) In her first official visit to the outlying regions, Ambassador Ragsdale, accompanied by Pol/Econ and Self-Help Clerk, presided over the opening of a Sewing Workshop for the Women's Association in Dikhil. The Self-Help program gave a \$5,000 grant to the Association Development de la Corne d'Afrique, a non-governmental organization led by a parliamentarian from the Dikhil district, to finance a sewing workshop for the Dikhil Women's Union. This grant was the first in more than a decade given to benefit the Women's Union. The sewing workshop had previously received a donation of ten sewing machines from UNICEF. At the initial site visit to the proposed project, most of these machines were worn-out or non-functioning. The \$5,000 grant provided the sewing workshop with new equipment and material. The women use their sewing center to display and sell their products to visitors. The workshop will also serve as a valuable teaching facility for the town's young women and provide many with the possibility of earning their own income.

3. (U) The Ambassador was escorted from the border of the Dikhil district into town by the gendarmerie and was met with a very warm welcome from the residents. Ambassador met immediately with the District Commissaire and two parliamentarians from Dikhil. Following the meeting Ambassador opened and toured the sewing workshop. They extended an official welcome and Ambassador expressed her pleasure in having the opportunity to meet the Commissaire and inaugurate the center, which was followed by a visit to the town's computer training center. Funded by a local businessman, the center provides training in computer applications to high school level students and businessmen. The center also provides a connection to the Internet, courtesy of Djibouti Telecom, though it is only available to students and not all residents.

4. (U) The day also included a roundtable discussion with other non-governmental organizations from Dikhil. Comments from the many associations were appreciative of American help and interest, but also offered a local perspective on American activities. One association representative commented that America should work for peace throughout the world and not practice favoritism. The secretary of the Women's Union commented that it was good to finally see the female side of American assistance. The secretary nicknamed the Ambassador "a new mother to the Women's Union." The secretary's reference to previous American assistance was that of a well dug outside the city in September 2003 by the Civil Affairs team at Camp Lemonier. Another association head entreated the Ambassador to not let this interest in Dikhil be the first and last. Ambassador responded with brief remarks on development and the rededication of U.S. commitment to advancing rights and opportunities of women everywhere.

5. (U) Following the roundtable discussion, the Ambassador toured the area around Dikhil, including two fruit farms and the well dug by the American military. The well, the first half of a two part project, was not in use. The parliamentarians and farmers explained that the American part of the project was to dig the 120 meter well and put in a pump, but the second half of the project was yet to be completed by the Office National des Eaux de Djibouti (ONED). ONED's portion was to provide canalization from the well to the surrounding farms and to the town. There was no estimate on when this portion of the project would start. The owners of the farms were part of the Agriculture Society of Dikhil and were pleased to welcome the Ambassador on a tour. Two of the farmers

who grew fruit gave the Ambassador bags of mangos, lemons and limes to take back to the Embassy. A third farmer presented the Ambassador with a baby goat as a gift, presumably to eat, although it has recently been adopted by an American officer at the Embassy.

16. (U) Dikhil is known as the "District of Unity" throughout Djibouti. With a population of 70,000 and a territory of 7,200 square meters, Dikhil's population is a conglomeration of all of Djibouti's ethnic groups - Somali, Afar and Arab. The Commissaire said, in his meeting with the Ambassador before the inauguration, that the Dikhil District is one of the few places in Djibouti where the different groups live together as one community and not merely cohabitate. The unique mixture of populations has led the governing authorities in Dikhil to create policies that all groups agree on. The Commissaire also noted that because Dikhil has a large portion of nomads in its population, it has tailored its voting procedures to the nomadic heritage. The district allows registration lists to be distributed to all polling centers in the Dikhil district so that a nomadic family is not tied to one single polling center, so long as it is within the Dikhil borders.

RAGSDALE